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Montana Pupil Transportation News and Updates January/February 2006



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A Newsletter Published by Pupil Transportation, School Budgeting and Accounting Division

Since You Asked

When am I supposed to use the strobes on my bus?

School bus drivers should use the strobes during periods of low visibility, at bus stops for greater visibility or in areas where a driver wants the on-coming traffic to be more aware, for instance when loading or unloading at the bus stop.



When will OPI make the 1st semester transportation reimbursement payment?

The first semester transportation reimbursement will be sent to the county treasurer on March 23, 2006 with the K-12 Direct State Aid payment.

Deadlines are very important in the months leading up to the reimbursement payment date. The TR-5's and TR-6's are posted to the transportation web site in January. The TR-5s and TR-6s are due to the county superintendent by February 1, 2006 and are due to the OPI by February 15, 2006. The turn-around time is very short between the due date and the payment date. Please make every effort to have the TR-5s and TR-6s completed, signed and submitted to the OPI by the deadline. Also to ensure that full payment can be made please make sure that all of the drivers had current certifications and all buses were inspected for the first semester.

If you have questions regarding this information, please call Maxine at (406) 444-3096.

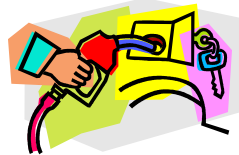
How does the state purchasing program work for fuel purchases?

School districts can sign up for the state purchasing program, which will allow them to purchase fuel along with the bulk purchasing power of the state. When a district purchases fuel and has an account with the program, the federal excise taxes are removed from clear diesel and unleaded gasoline and any bulk discounts are applied. Participating stations offer up to \$0.02 a gallon discount.

15-70-356. Refund or credit authorized. (1) A person who purchases and uses any special fuel on which the

Montana special fuel license tax has been paid for operating stationary special fuel engines used off the public highways and streets or for any commercial use other than operating vehicles upon any of the public highways or streets of this state is allowed a refund of the amount of tax paid directly or indirectly on the special fuel used if the person has records, as provided in 15-70-323, to prove nontaxable use. The refund may not exceed the tax paid or to be paid to the state.

(2)(a) The United States government, the state of Montana, any other state, or any county, incorporated city, town, or school district of this state is entitled to a refund of the taxes paid on special fuel regardless of the use of the special fuel.



Section (2)(a) would allow a school district to purchase all fuel through the state purchasing program for its transportation program regardless of who owns the bus if it is used for transporting kids to and from school and school-related activities.

The important thing to remember is that the fuel has to be purchased by the district – the bill has to be in its name. Contractor purchased fuel is not eligible for the state tax refund.

What about dyed fuel? How do I know who can use it?

Any vehicle with a tax exempt plate can run dyed diesel. Vehicles owned by governmental entities are entitled to a refund of the taxes paid on "*special fuel regardless of the use of the special fuel.*"

To sign up for the state purchasing program, please contact Devon Garrity at (406) 444-3366. He will be more than happy to provide additional information and help school districts utilize the many benefits of this program. The program has been sent out for bid since the old contract ended December 31, 2005. Devin expects that with new participants and expanded purchasing power, the discounts may be even better in 2006.

Do you have any plans to help with school bus driver training in the eastern side of the state?

Roger Britton, Superintendent at Froid Public Schools has asked me to help him set up training for bus drivers on the eastern side of the state. We contacted Rick Verhassel, and he is willing to help us find a central place in Sidney. The tentative training day is Saturday, September 9, 2006. Our hope is to provide a one-day training that would allow drivers to fulfill the 10-hour training requirement. We plan to establish an "S" endorsement testing site as well for any drivers that have not yet passed the test. The absolute final deadline for meeting the "S" endorsement requirement is September 30, 2006.



All drivers are welcome to attend. Any suggestions for types of training that drivers would like are appreciated. For more information, please watch the web site, the newsletters or contact Maxine at mmougeot@mt.gov.

Quote of the Month

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

- Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931)

THANKS TO EVERYONE FOR PROMPTLY RETURNING THE TRAINING VIDEOS

The contact for ordering training videos is:

Raelen Williard at the OPI Resource Center. Raelen's phone number is (406) 444-2082. Raelen can be reached by email at rwilliard@mt.gov or fax at (406) 444-3924.

Before you call Raelen, go to the transportation web site at www.opi.mt.gov/pupiltransport for the list of available training tapes. It is important for you to know which tapes you want when you call to order.

TRANSPORTATION WEB SITE

Check it out – go to www.opi.mt.gov/pupiltransport and see what you can find. Our Information Services Division works hard to keep the websites current and all the links working appropriately.

The ultimate goal is to provide greater access to and easier down loading of the documents posted to the transportation website.

School Bus transportation standards, handbook, driver information, bus information, payment information, business links, the Pupil Transportation newsletter, transportation contact information, forms, nearly everything that anyone would be looking for related to pupil transportation is located on the site.

If there is something that would make the site more complete or understandable, please call Maxine at 444-3096 and make a request. The purpose of the site is to provide up-to-date and accurate transportation information to make the job of transporting Montana's students to and from school as safe as possible.

What if I have questions and I want to do some research before I call OPI?

Go to www.opi.mt.gov and click on the "Get Answers" tab on the top left side of the screen. The tab has a search engine that will find everything associated with a key word. For instance, to find the answers to bus route questions, type in the word "route." There will be many "hits" to choose from.

If you are to the "Get Answers" page and the answer is not there, click the "Ask a Question" tab, type a question and an answer will be provided in a most timely fashion.

February 1, 2006 - All corrections for school bus inspections, driver certificates, bus routes and Individual Transportation Contracts should be submitted to the OPI in preparation for the 1st Semester Transportation Aid Reimbursement

February 1, 2006 - Completed TR-5's and TR-6's due to County Superintendent

February 15, 2006 - Completed TR-5's and TR-6's due to OPI

March 23, 2006 - Transportation Aid Reimbursement made to Counties for distribution to schools

March 25, 2006 – School Bus Driver Training – Fairfield, MT. Hosted by Greenfield Public Schools, Contact Joyce Schrock at (406)467-2433

March/April 2006 - TR-4's, Pre-printed Individual Contracts are sent to districts for ensuing year

April 2006 - New bus driver listing sent to districts

June 21, 22, 23, 2006 – MAPT Conference in Kalispell, MT – Contact Betty Kunkel at (406) 454-6776.

Watch for information regarding special classes just for mechanics at the **June MAPT Conference**.

****Update driver certificates, bus inspection forms, route information and Individual Transportation Contracts information regularly.****

Prompt and accurate transportation reimbursement depends on it.

